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ABSTRACT

This study explored views and attitudes toward full inclusion and collaboration among 43 directors and coordinators of special education in randomly selected school districts in eastern Kentucky. Although both collaboration and full inclusion were in effect in parts of each school district surveyed, results showed that only about half of the survey's respondents favored collaboration, with only 16% favoring full inclusion. Furthermore, while about half believed special education teachers were prepared for collaboration, only 12% considered them to be prepared for full inclusion. No respondents believed regular education teachers were prepared for collaboration or full inclusion. (PB)

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ED 393 234

APPROPRIATE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN COLLABORATIVE AND INCLUSIONARY PROGRAMS

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by

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presented

at

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Abstract

The corner stone of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is the right of students with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. A least restrictive environment can be identified only when a continuum of educational alternatives is available. In Kentucky many school districts have implemented full inclusion to the exclusion of the least restrictive educational alternatives. This has caused concerns to many special educators. This study was conducted to explore the views of the directors/coordinators of special education in 43 randomly selected school districts in eastern half of Kentucky regarding full inclusion and collaboration. Their opinions about the preparation of both special and regular education teachers to provide education to students with disabilities in these service delivery models was also studied. Results showed that about half of the special education directors/coordinators favored collaboration and only 16% favored full inclusion. About half of them believed that special education teachers were prepared for collaboration but only 12% considered the special education teachers prepared for full inclusion. None of them believed that the regular education teachers were prepared for collaboration or for full inclusion. Given these results, the appropriateness of education provided to students with disabilities in these programs is questionable.

The enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandated a new concept of educational placement for students with disabilities. This was known as the least restrictive environment (LRE). The law defined this concept as follows:

> "(1) That to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and
> (2) That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature of severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aides and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."
> (20 U. S. C 1412 (5) (B); 1414 (a) (1) (C) (iv).

The concept of the least restrictive environment is further explained in the federal regulations pertaining to this law. Regulation 500.551 states:

> "(a) Each public agency shall insure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of handicapped children for special education and related services.
> (b) The continuum required under paragraph (a) of this section must:
> (1) Include the alternative placements listed in the definition of special education under Reg. 300.13 of Subpart A, (instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospital and institutions, and
> (2) Make provisions for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement."
> (20 U) S. C. 1412 (5) (B)

The federal regulations are quite clear in communicating that a school district should provide a continuum of educational alternatives to meet the special needs of the variety of special education students. On this continuum, an appropriate least restrictive educational environment should be selected.

Regulation 300.552 gives additional criteria to be used in the selection of the educational environment. One of these criteria is as follows:

> "(d) In selecting the least restrictive environment, consideration is given to any harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services which he or she needs."
> (20 U. S. C. 1412 (5) (B)

The "quality of services" refers to another major mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act... **free and appropriate public education(FAPE)** which was one of the purposes of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. To understand FAPE one needs to remember that prior to this law about two million school age children were excluded from the educational system because of the severity of their handicapping conditions. Given the legislative history of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act FAPE is its cornerstone.

The two provisions of the law, i.e. the least restrictive environment and the free and appropriate education are interrelated. Each should be considered along with the other and not in isolation of the other. A review of the case law suggests that the courts have ruled in favor of a more restrictive educational environment over a less restrictive environment when it was deemed to result in a more appropriate education. (Barness v. Fairfax County School, 1991, Gillette v. Fairland Board of Education., 1991, Devries v. Fairfax County School Board, 1989).

At this time it is appropriate to also look at another law which has received increasing attention in the context of education of disabled students. This law is the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A regulation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act says:

> "it should be stressed that, where a handicapped child is so disruptive in a regular classroom that the education of other students is significantly impaired, the needs of the handicapped child cannot be met in that environment. Therefore regular placement would not be appropriate to his or her needs..."

Over the years the continuum of educational alternatives has undergone a change from the way it was originally conceptualized.

Figure 1. The Continuum of Educational Alternatives
(Insert about here)

Within the regular education classroom varying degrees of inclusion are occurring through additional service delivery models, which include consultation, collaboration, and team teaching.

Figure 2. Inclusion Model

Increasingly, special education teachers are serving as consulting and/or collaborating teachers to classroom teachers. These models have been implemented but there continues to be considerable resistance to them in the field. Many general education and special education teachers do not endorse these models.

Another major development which has occurred in the past few years is that in spite of clear federal regulations, professional opinions and individual philosophies have taken precedence over the legislative mandate. Special educators have become divided over the placement issue between those who adhere to the least restrictive environment and those who advocate full inclusion for all students with disabilities. The full inclusion philosophy is resulting in the full time integration of severely disabled students, who have thus far been served primarily in special education self-contained programs, in regular education classrooms. Neither all general education nor all special education professionals support full inclusion.

Purpose

This pilot study, part of a major study, was conducted to investigate the feelings and perceptions of local level special education administrators (special education coordinators or directors) in the eastern half of Kentucky regarding collaboration and inclusion. The purpose was to explore whether the special education coordinators or directors were supportive of either or both service delivery models and their perceptions regarding the preparation of special education teachers for teaching in these programs.

Methodology

In a structured interview, the subjects, 43 randomly selected directors or coordinators of special education in the eastern half of Kentucky as per Table 1, were asked to respond by a yes or no answer to eight questions. These questions were designed to solicit their opinion about collaboration and full inclusion as models of service delivery. Additionally, the questions intended to gather their perception of the teachers in their individual school districts regarding these two service delivery models.

Insert Table one about here

Responses of the interviewees were recorded on the questionnaire. Frequencies of yes/no responses were computed which were converted into percentages. These are reported in Table 2.

Insert Table two about here

The data analysis showed that of the 43 subjects 53% responded affirmatively to question number one. Only 16% responded in the affirmative to question number two. The response to question number three was 49% in the affirmative. In contrast, the response to question number four was 7% in the affirmative. In response to question number five 51% of the respondents said that

special education teachers were prepared for collaboration. On the other hand, only 12% said that special education teachers were prepared for full inclusion. None of the subjects responded affirmatively to question number seven or eight. In other words, the subjects of this investigation did not believe that the regular education teachers were either prepared for collaboration or full inclusion.

Discussion

Results of this study show that about half of the special education directors or coordinators are in favor of collaborative model of service delivery. And, only 16% are in favor of the full inclusion of students with disabilities. Yet, in each county, which was represented in this study, both models of service delivery are implemented. In some counties, these two models have in fact replaced the continuum of educational alternatives county-wide. In some others, these two models have been implemented in a few selected schools to the exclusion of the least restrictive environment.

Given the fact that according to the perception of the special education directors or coordinators the collaborative and full inclusion programs respectively enjoy 49% and 7% support of the special education teachers, it is difficult for an outsider to understand how these programs are implemented so widely. There are a few reasons. One is that under the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 a majority of decisions are made by the School Based Decision Making Councils. Members of the Councils are neither familiar with the special education statutes nor its regulations. They are not aware of the variety of special education programs. They are not special educators and do not know the varying needs of special education students.

The Division for Exceptional Children Services at the Kentucky Department of Education has had a big federal grant under the Systems Change Project for a few years. A major objective of this grant is to change systems to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities. Personnel in charge of the Systems Change Project are aggressively pushing for full inclusion of all disabled students. Many school personnel for the most part now see full inclusion as a mandate from the division.

The Kentucky Educational Reform Act (KERA) has a target date of 1996 for its full implementation. For the last four years it is being implemented incrementally. The Act funds school districts according to the number of pupils served. Unlike the past years it does not earmark the special education funds separately. Consequently, many educators believe that full inclusion is a KERA requirement. Therefore, they are actively implementing it.

One of the basic purposes of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is the provision of a free appropriate

public education. According to the perception of the special education directors/coordinators about half of the special education teachers are prepared for collaboration and only 12% are prepared for inclusion. In other words, only half of the special education teachers who are now serving in collaborative programs, in the opinion of their special education directors or coordinators are able to provide an appropriate education. And, of the total number of students who are being served in inclusive programs 88% are perhaps not receiving an appropriate education.

Both in the collaborative and inclusionary programs the classroom teacher is responsible for the education of **all** students. According to the directors/coordinators of special education who participated in this investigation 0% of the classroom teachers are prepared for collaboration or inclusion. This raises a legal question. If the teachers are not prepared, how can they provide an appropriate education to their students? My answer is in the negative. They cannot. Therefore, the appropriateness of education being provided to students with disabilities in these collaborative and full inclusion programs is, to say the least, questionable. This can have serious implications and possible repercussions for Kentucky. School districts which have implemented the collaboration and full inclusion programs to the exclusion of other educational alternatives may find themselves out of compliance with IDEA because of their failure to provide an appropriate education and failure to provide the continuum of the least restrictive environments. If challenged, these school districts may have to provide for compensatory education of their disabled students who are currently in these programs.

The focus of the Kentucky Education Reform Act was on the grade schools. They have already changed significantly. Partly because of this change the system of service delivery has also changed in the public schools. The teacher education programs in Kentucky have not kept pace with the service delivery system. The gap between the teacher education programs and the job responsibilities of both the special education and regular education teachers is reflected in the findings of this investigation. The need for redesigning the teacher education programs in Kentucky seems to be overdue.

Conclusions

This investigation was a pilot study. It has provided valuable information that needs serious examination. The appropriateness of education being provided to disabled students in collaborative and full inclusionary programs is questionable. This needs to be reviewed by the Division for Exceptional Children Services immediately because it has serious repercussions for the entire state.

The results have also provided information concerning the appropriateness of the existing teacher education programs. These programs may benefit from a careful review of the emerging service delivery options and redesigning of their teacher education programs.

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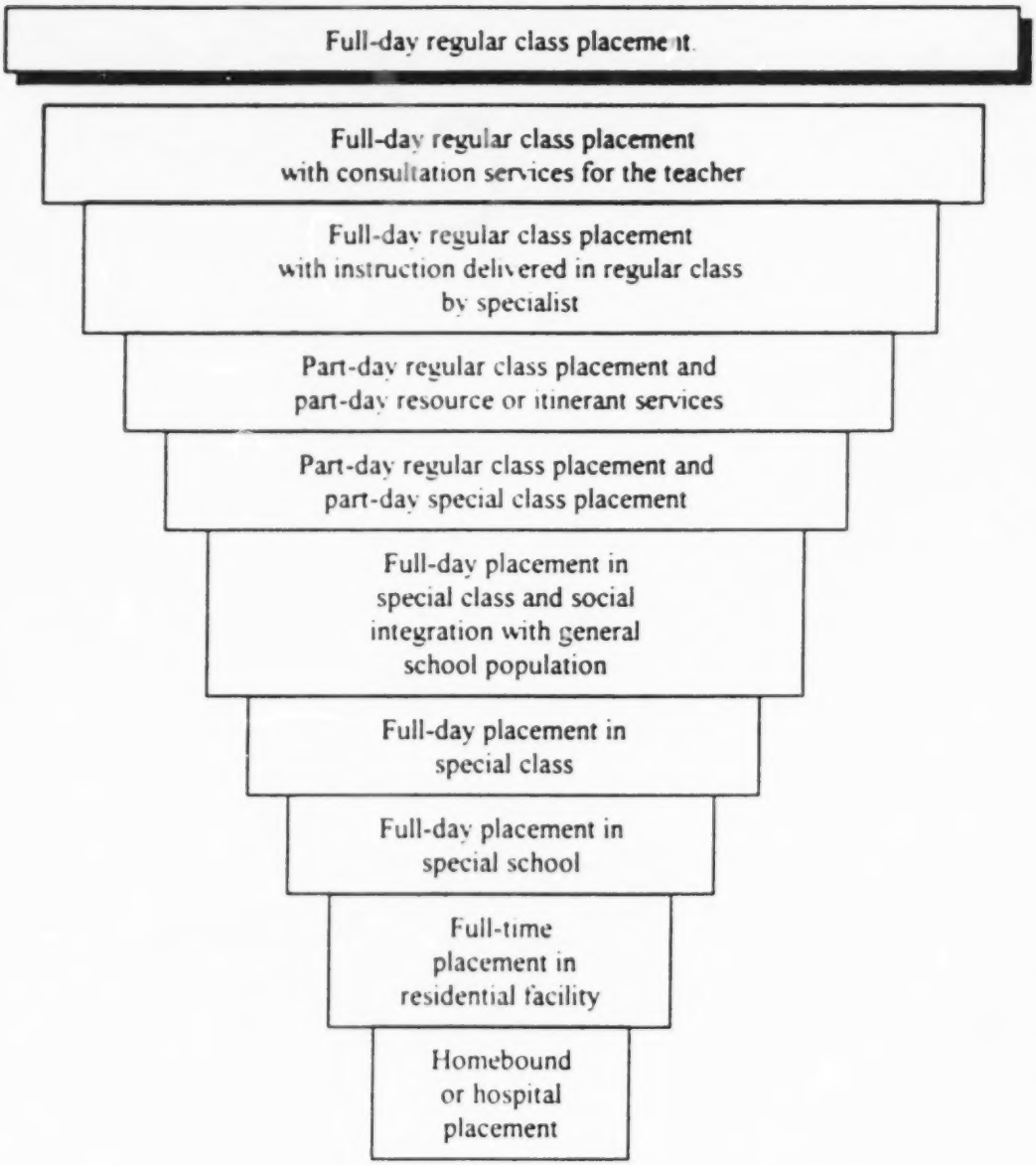
Table 1 - Names of Participating School Districts

Monticello	Russell	McCreary
Clinton	Knox	Whitley
Laurel	Williamsburg	Perry
Clay	Jackson	Lee
Estill	Clark	Casey
Lincoln	Floyd	Rockcastle
Grant	Campbell	Mercer
Cumberland	Wayne	Pulaski
Burgin Ind.	Somerset Ind.	Berea Ind.
Nicholas	Letcher	Pike
Garrard	Madison	Harrodsburg Ind.
Harlan	Bell	Middlesboro Ind.
Pineville Ind.	Leslie	Johnson
Bath	Newport Ind.	Campbellsville Ind.
Fayette		

Table 2- Frequencies and Percentages of responses
N = 43

Question	Yes	%	No	%
1. Are you in favor of collaboration?	23	53	20	47
2. Are you in favor of full inclusion?	7	16	36	84
3. In your opinion are special education teachers in favor of collaboration?	21	49	22	51
4. In your opinion are special education teachers in favor of full inclusion?	3	7	40	93
5. In your opinion are special education teachers prepared for collaboration?	22	51	21	49
6. In your opinion are special education teachers prepared for full inclusion?	5	12	38	88
7. In your opinion are regular education prepared for collaboration?	0	0	43	100
8. In your opinion are regular education teachers prepared for full inclusion?	0	0	43	100

Figure 1- The Continuum of Educational Alternatives


Full-day regular class placement
Full-day regular class placement with consultation services for the teacher
Full-day regular class placement with instruction delivered in regular class by specialist
Part-day regular class placement and part-day resource or itinerant services
Part-day regular class placement and part-day special class placement
Full-day placement in special class and social integration with general school population
Full-day placement in special class
Full-day placement in special school
Full-time placement in residential facility
Homebound or hospital placement

From Least to Most Restrictive Environments

Figure 2 - Full Inclusion Model

Team Teaching

Collaboration

Regular Education Classroom
All Students

Consultation

Related Services